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ART AND PROGRESS

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GOVERNMENT ART

Within the last month the report of the National Commission of Fine Arts on the artistic character and aspect of the Panama Canal has been published. It gives an excellent description of the Canal and makes some modest recommendations, but no radical suggestions either of change or subsequent improvement. The reason for this is given briefly as follows:

"The Canal itself, and all the structures connected with it, impress one with a sense of their having been built with a view strictly to their utility. There is an entire absence of ornament, and no evidence that the esthetic has been considered except in a few cases as a secondary consideration.

"Because of this very fact there is little to find fault with from the artist's point of view. The Canal, like the pyramids or some imposing object in natural scenery, is impressive from its scale and simplicity and directness. One feels that anything done merely for the purpose of beautifying it would not only fail to accomplish that purpose, but would be an impertinence."

The most notable thing about this report, therefore, is that it was rendered in compliance with a request of Congress set forth in a special Act. This in itself is a remarkable token of progress. Though much has been said and written on the subject, Congress has been extremely slow to realize that art is an element in the development of civilization and a large factor in the upbuilding of nations. It has not seemed to comprehend that it had an economic as well as esthetic side—that beauty in cities, and in separate buildings is a distinct asset—though millions of dollars are poured into Europe every summer by American travelers for no other reason than this. But we are advancing. A few years ago the appointment of a Fine Arts Commission met with violent opposition; now it is a recognized authority and its expert judgment freely and frankly sought. That artists should venture opinion with reference to public buildings and monuments was not long ago thought by many Congressmen to be an impertinence and today Congress itself seeks that opinion with reference to a great engineering work.

It is true, perhaps, that it would have been better to have called in the experts before quite so much was done, to have made the artists coworkers with the engineers, rather than superficial decorators, but to have sought them at all shows an awakening and must be recognized as a long step in the right direction.

Lest some may take too much comfort in this thought and imagine that there is no further need of effort it may be well to add that this evidence of enlightenment is to an extent offset by other incidents. The Senate's opposition to the

removal of the tariff on art, so lately as last summer, on the old, worn grounds, that art is a luxury, must be recalled. Another instance either of ignorance or indifference on the part of the same body was given in September when a joint resolution was introduced into the Senate by a well-known Senator authorizing the removal from the capitol grounds of Greenough's statue of Washington and its presentation to the Smithsonian Institution "to aid that institution in its efforts to establish a national gallery of art in the city of Washington." The statue was removed to the Smithsonian Institution four years ago, and, according to a decree of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia, a National Gallery of Art has been established for many more years. But who knew and who cared? The resolution was read twice and referred to the Committee on the Library.

And so while there is gain it is slow, and the need of education is urgent. It is not the individual that concerns us, but the masses. What is wanted is a universal knowledge and love of art.

To this end the museums, the school art associations, the women's clubs are all contributing. For this ultimate purpose the American Federation of Arts was formed and is sending out exhibitions, lectures, lantern slides, answering inquiries, publishing ART AND PROGRESS. The combination of these forces multiplies their efficiency and the result is bound to be felt and seen, as it is, we believe, seen in the Act of Congress which called for a report from the Fine Arts Commission on the Panama Canal.

limoge enamels, tapestries, furniture, rugs and other art objects; and it has elected a new president, Mr. Robert W. de Forest. The acquisition of the Altman collection greatly enriches the Museum and places it among the foremost museums of the world; the election of Mr. de Forest insures the continuance of the broad policies under which this museum has lately been governed, as well as further development upon a sound basis. These facts are of importance, not merely to citizens of New York but to every one, for the Metropolitan Museum of Art is something more than a local institution—its influence is far-reaching and as time passes will be more so. Its collections are free and accessible to all and the richer they become the greater proportionately will be the privileges and opportunities it offers. Many museums are being built, more each year, throughout the United States, all of which look to this older and stronger institution for example and aid. Mr. de Forest is peculiarly well fitted for leadership in such an institution, not only having been intimately associated with the work for years, serving both as vice-president and secretary, but combining rare knowledge of art with experience in business and interest in social problems relating to the betterment of mankind.

At the same time that Mr. de Forest was elected president Mr. Henry W. Kent who, for a number of years has served most efficiently as assistant secretary, was elected secretary.

NOTES

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Two events of signal importance will be recorded by a future historian of the Metropolitan Museum of Art as occurring in the autumn of the present year: the Museum has received as a bequest from the late Benjamin Altman a collection of extraordinary value, comprising oil paintings, Chinese porcelains,

THE SCHOOL ART LEAGUE, NEW YORK

A step of far-reaching importance has been taken recently by the School Art League of New York. It is the establishment of free popular talks for children in each of the two great art museums of that city—the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Institute Museum. At the same time the Art League has inaugurated a similar form of instruction, but